



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**
Division of Child Development and Early
Education

ROY COOPER • Governor
KODY H. KINSLEY • Secretary
ARIEL FORD • Director

October 23, 2023

Dear ECE Community,

Congratulations to the 192 awardees of the Expansion and Access Grants! We're so excited to see what you will do for your children, families, and community. We're rooting for you and here to support you the way we've always supported early educators in North Carolina!

I am so sorry we could not give grants to all that applied. All of us at DCDEE know how hard you work. You poured your hearts into your applications, sharing with us your dreams, your plans, what this would mean for your communities and your own families. We were tasked with the heavy responsibility of narrowing down the applications to just 192 awards. I'm sorry the money could not go further. I know how much you want to do for children and families, and I plan to take your enthusiasm and passion into next budget session, asking for funds to award more grants.

I want to apologize again for the time it took for us to finalize the awards. Over the course of the two application cycles, DCDEE received overwhelming interest in this project with over 3,400 applications being submitted for over \$759 million in requests. In many cases, programs had complete and well-developed plans, but the location of the program or other legislatively driven criteria drove our selections.

In 2021 the North Carolina General Assembly allocated DCDEE \$20 million to expand access to high quality child care and NC Pre-K. They outlined priority areas for expansion that included low performing school districts, child care deserts, and low-income counties and expressly for the startup of new programs, the expansion of existing programs, and the quality improvement and maintenance of existing programs.

I do want to point out two bright spots for early educators in the new state budget. No new money was given to continue stabilization grants, lawmakers will allow the Division to repurpose existing funds to extend the stabilization grants through June 2024. We will share more information about that soon. Also, the expansion of NC Medicaid will hopefully mean many more of you will have access to affordable healthcare next year!

You are the workforce that helps raise NC's children and economy. I'm honored to work for you.

Take care of yourselves and each other,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ariel S. Ford".

Ariel S. Ford

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • DIVISION OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY EDUCATION

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